

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic shopping system, comprising:

a first connection between a first merchant computer and a network host computer, said first connection for transmitting product information to said network host computer in accordance with a first type of connectivity;

a second connection between a second merchant computer and said network host computer, said second connection for transmitting product information to said network host computer in accordance with a second type of connectivity;

a database at said network host computer for storing said product information from said first merchant computer and said second merchant computer;

a first computer program at said network host computer for assimilating said product information; and

a third connection between said network host computer and a customer computer, said third connection for transmitting said assimilated product information to said customer computer and for transmitting real time updates to said assimilated product information, said real time updates obtained in accordance with said first connection and said second connection.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein said first connection and said second connection further comprises:

a connection between said first merchant computer and a regional host computer;

a connection between said second merchant computer and said regional host computer; and

a connection between said regional host computer and said network host computer, wherein said regional host computer receives said product information from said first

merchant computer and said second merchant computer and transmits said product information to said network host computer.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein said customer computer utilizes an information management interface to simplify communication between said customer computer and said network host computer.

4. The system of claim 1, further comprising a second computer program, wherein said customer computer utilizes said second computer program to further process said product information.

5. The system of claim 1 wherein said first connection comprises a switch in communication with said first merchant computer and said network host computer, said switch adapted to assimilate said product information from said first merchant computer and to transfer said product information to said network host computer.

6. The system of claim 5 wherein said first connection is a packet switch network, Ethernet, or modem connection.

7. The system of claim 1 wherein said second connection comprises a switch in communication with said second merchant computer and said network host computer, said switch adapted to assimilate said product information from said second merchant computer and to transfer said product information to said network host computer.

8. The system of claim 7 wherein said second connection is a packet switch network, Ethernet, or modem connection.

9. The system of claim 1 wherein said first type of connectivity and said second type of connectivity are selected from the group of TCP/IP, SNA, or X.25 connectivity.

10. The system of claim 1 wherein said real time updates to said assimilated product information at said customer computer are obtained in response to a customer computer request for updated product information.

11. A method for electronic shopping, comprising the steps of:

transmitting product information from a first merchant computer to a network host computer in accordance with a first type of connectivity;

transmitting product information from a second merchant computer to said network host computer in accordance with a second type of connectivity;

storing said product information from said first merchant computer and said second merchant computer in a database;

establishing a connection between a customer computer and a host computer in communication with said database, said customer computer adapted to display information received from said host computer;

receiving at said host computer a request from said customer computer for product information from said database;

assimilating product information from said database in accordance with said request from said customer computer;

transmitting from said host computer to said customer computer said assimilated product information;

displaying said assimilated product information at said customer computer; and

updating said assimilated product information at said customer computer in response to a request from said customer computer for a real-time update of said assimilated product information with product information from said first merchant computer and said second merchant computer.

12. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

generating a display of assimilated product information in response to real-time changes to product information from said first merchant computer and said second merchant computer.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein said first type of connectivity and said second type of connectivity is selected from the group of TCP/IP, SNA, or X.25 connectivity.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of transmitting product information from said first merchant computer comprises the steps of:

transmitting said product information from said first merchant computer to a regional host computer; and

transmitting said product information from said regional host computer to said network host computer.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of transmitting product information from said second merchant computer comprises the steps of:

transmitting said product information from said second merchant computer to a regional host computer; and

transmitting said product information from said regional host computer to said network host computer.

16. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of transmitting product information from a first merchant computer to a network host computer comprises the steps of:

transmitting product information from said first merchant computer to a switch; and

transmitting said product information from said switch to said network host computer.

17. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of transmitting product information from a second merchant computer to a network host computer comprises the steps of:

transmitting product information from said second merchant computer to a switch; and  
transmitting said product information from said switch to said network host computer.

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18. A method for obtaining real time product information comprising the steps of:  
establishing a first connection between a first merchant computer and a network host computer;  
transmitting product information from said first merchant computer to said network host computer;  
establishing a second connection between a second merchant computer and said network host computer;  
transmitting product information from said second merchant computer to said network host computer;  
storing said product information from said first merchant computer and said second merchant computer in a database;  
establishing a connection between said network host computer and a customer computer;  
receiving a request for product information from said customer computer;  
assimilating product information in response to said request from said customer computer;  
transmitting said assimilated product information to said customer computer;  
displaying said assimilated product information at said customer computer; and  
updating said assimilated product information at said customer computer with updated product information from said first merchant computer and said second merchant computer.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the step of establishing said first connection and said second connection comprises the step of establishing said first connection and said second connection in accordance with connectivity selected from the group of TCP/IP, SNA, or X.25 connectivity.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein the step of establishing said first connection and said second connection comprises the step of establishing said first connection and said second connection in accordance with a packet switch network, Ethernet, or modem connection.

21. A real time shopping system comprising:

product information from a plurality of merchant computers;

a plurality of connections between said plurality of merchant computers and a host computer, said connections for uploading said product information to said host computer;

a database at said host computer for storing said product information from said plurality of merchant computers;

a computer program at said host computer for assimilating said product information;

a connection between said host computer and a customer computer, said connection for transmitting to said customer computer said assimilated product information;

updates to said assimilated product information, said updates obtained in accordance with said plurality of connections between said plurality of merchant computers and said host computer; and

a display at said customer computer for presenting said assimilated product information and said updates to said assimilated product information.

22. The system of claim 21 further comprising a regional host computer, said regional host computer adapted to facilitate said plurality of connections between said plurality of merchant computers and said host computer.

23. The system of claim 22 wherein said product information is assimilated at said regional host computer.

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24. The system of claim 21 further comprising a switch, said switch adapted to facilitate said plurality of connections between said plurality of merchant computers and said host computer.

25. The system of claim 24 wherein said product information is assimilated at said switch.

26. The system of claim 21 further comprising an information management interface to simplify communication between said customer computer and said host computer.

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